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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Arlington Village is representative of the influences of developer Gustave Ring on the development of the large-scale garden apartment complexes, inspiring a formula that was repeated throughout the United States for similar multi-family projects funded by Federal Housing Administration-insured mortgages. Designed by Washington, D.C. architect Harvey Warwick, Arlington Village was the second, large rental-housing complex constructed by Gustave Ring in Arlington County, Virginia. The development, begun in October 1939, was financed through the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and provided the lowest rental costs in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. In order to maximize the cost effectiveness of the project, the development repeats four standard buildings with alternating roof designs and room arrangements, resulting in the construction of six hundred fifty-six (656) apartment units over approximately fifty-three acres. Ring and Warwick designed Arlington Village to be a complete community in itself; dwelling units were arranged in court complexes set within intimate green spaces augmented by parking, recreational parks, hidden service areas, and a shopping center with six stores. The success of Arlington Village and Ring's ability to construct a garden apartment complex that was affordable and attractive to an increasing number of middle-class workers moving into the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area inspired the Federal Housing Administration to promote the use of this formula throughout the United States.

Arlington Village is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under criterion C in the area of community planning and development because of its unique garden apartment plan, which spurred similar developments funded by FHA-insured mortgages. Further, the design of the 1939 garden apartment complex had a substantial influence on the overall high-quality design of apartment complexes throughout Arlington County and the United States in the first half of the 20th century. Arlington Village is an excellent example of the garden apartment complex as described in the Multiple Property Nomination, *Garden Apartments, Apartment Houses and Apartment Complexes in Arlington County, Virginia: 1934-1954*.

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The property consists of six hundred fifty-six apartment units, a shopping center, a swimming pool, pool house, and two tennis courts. All of the apartment units and the shopping center are contributing. The pool, pool house and two tennis courts are non-contributing.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Arlington County during the first half of the 20th Century

During the early 1900s, increased dependability on area streetcars allowed residents of Arlington to work in the District of Columbia and thus, the County began to be marketed as a commuter suburb. Developers and real estate agencies advertised that the County allowed both conveniences to Washington, D.C. and a healthy, bucolic setting for family life. The 1907 publication, *A Brief History of Alexandria County*, touted the advantages of Arlington's proximity to Washington, D.C.:

A person living in Alexandria County [now Arlington County] enjoys, free of cost, all the Government institutions of Washington city, its libraries, its colleges, schools, museums, art galleries, and public buildings and at the same time enjoys the health of country life and escapes all the discomforts of a crowded city.¹

Between World War I and World War II (1917-1945), Arlington County developed a strong identity of its own. Owing to confusion between the City and County of Alexandria, the Virginia General Assembly voted in 1920 to change the name of Alexandria County to Arlington County. The boundaries of the newly named county were challenged when the community of Clarendon attempted to incorporate as a town in 1920. This action was defeated when the courts ruled that Arlington County was "a 'continuous, contiguous, and homogeneous community' that could not be subdivided for the purposes of incorporating a part of it."² Thus, Arlington County began self-government as a single unit without subdivisions.

Beginning in 1920, when the population was just 16,040, Arlington County began to grow at an intense rate as a suburb of Washington, D.C. This compelled the General Assembly of the

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Commonwealth of Virginia to redistrict the area, giving Arlington County its own delegates in the state's House of Delegates in 1924 and a state senator by 1944. In 1929, the City of Alexandria had annexed another portion of land from southern Arlington County that included the coveted Potomac Yards. Consequently, a special provision was introduced in 1932 preventing further annexation between the City of Alexandria and Arlington County. In 1965, the formal boundaries of Arlington County were established, comprising an area of 25.7 square miles.³

Arlington County's evolution from a commuter suburb to an important employment center in its own right continued through the latter half of the 20th century. By the 1990s, apartment dwellers outnumbered those in single-family houses and almost all of the land in Arlington had been developed, much of it consisting of numerous areas where multi-family dwellings dominate. Although no longer rural, Arlington County remains a continuous, contiguous and homogeneous suburban community, with an economy that reflects a key federal presence and a steadily expanding roster of national association and corporations. Arlington has evolved into a thoroughly urban area and part of the core of the Washington Metropolitan Area.

Arlington Village and Apartment Development In Arlington County, Virginia: 1934-1954

While the population of Washington, D.C. and its suburbs increased dramatically in the years prior to World War I, it increased tremendously after the war. The first increase in the population in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area was attributed to the tripling of the federal work force between 1916 and 1918. The 1920 census reveals that for the first time, the majority of Americans lived in urban and suburban settings, with the suburban population growing at a much quicker rate.⁴ The Great Depression suppressed the extensive building rate that had occurred in Washington, D.C. during the 1920s. By 1934-1935, the construction of new housing units, specifically apartment buildings, was attributed to the influx of new federal workers under Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal programs. Arlington County, whose rural landscape would soon be an image from the past, became one of the fastest developing counties in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area.⁵ The extensive housing shortage in Washington, D.C. led

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to the construction of approximately one hundred seventy-six (176) new apartment buildings or complexes in Arlington County between 1934 and 1954. These new apartment buildings and complexes included both small and large developments. The development of Arlington Village by Gustave Ring was the second large garden apartment complex he built in Arlington County and its success was based on improvements he made at the first complex he constructed, Colonial Village.

The construction of garden apartments in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area reached a peak in the mid-1930s and early 1940s. In Arlington County, local officials and the federal government wanted to avoid the construction of sub-standard, large-scale developments that would dissolve into slums after the housing emergency eased. Thus, one of the focuses of apartment developments between 1934 and 1954 was the need to construct affordable, attractive and permanent housing. Cost efficiency was continuously emphasized in the construction process, especially for projects backed by the Federal Housing Administration.

Many of the residents who relocated to Arlington were employed under the New Deal programs of the 1930s. The number of Arlington residents continued to grow, with the population reaching 26,615 residents in 1930. This number was more than doubled ten years later with a total of 57,040 residents in 1940. Of those employed in 1940, more than 40% were involved with the government on a local, state, or federal basis. These workers, who made up the largest group of families and individuals in need of rental housing, spurred the government to become involved in housing developments. "Increased rentals for...apartment units... coming in the wake of the largest federal payrolls since the World War [I], were the primary reason for the great revival of...building. Thousands of new employees of the New Deal agencies rapidly took up the slack in residential space, causing rentals to increase 25 percent and more."⁶ The Federal Housing Administration (FHA), established in 1934, became the primary mortgage insurers for thousands of residential projects, both single-family and multiple dwellings, throughout the United States. Between 1934 and 1940, the FHA insured mortgages on 240 rental projects throughout the country and 200 of them were garden apartment projects.⁷ The FHA's involvement in Arlington County directly impacted a number of large apartment complexes that would be constructed in the country between 1934-1954. Arlington County's location along the

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banks of the Potomac River across from Washington, D.C. attracted a number of developers with FHA-insured mortgages to construct these large-scale housing projects. Where the FHA was not directly involved, they influenced the designs and layouts of hundreds of complexes and individual apartments being built in Arlington County. The dramatic increase in population during the 1930s and the limited availability of affordable rental housing for the middle-class government worker made the County a prime development area.

Federal Housing Administration and Its Influence on Arlington Village and Apartment Developments in Arlington County, Virginia: 1934-1939

Prior to the establishment of the Federal Housing Administration, the United States government generally avoided any involvement in the mortgage-lending business. The collapse of the stock market in 1929 and the subsequent foreclosures on thousands of properties by mortgage lenders led to the increasing demand for government assistance. The Federal Home Loan Bank Act of 1932 had set up a home loan banking system that “authorized to make advances to member home financing institutions secured by first mortgages.”⁸ This act was the first of a number of attempts by the Hoover administration to address the concerns of the homeowner and mortgage lending communities. The election of Franklin Roosevelt and the continuing devastation of the housing situation led the new administration to focus a number of new laws on these issues, particularly the establishment of the National Recovery Act of 1933. This act “authorized the use of Federal funds through the Public Works Administration to finance low-cost and slum clearance housing and subsistence homesteads.”⁹ These actions, although not the cure all that the American people hoped it to be, were the building blocks that led to the National Housing Act of 1934 and the establishment of the Federal Housing Administration.

The National Housing Act (NHA) had four main provisions in addition to the establishment of the Federal Housing Administration. The first provision of the NHA provided insurance against loss on property improvement loans and was to operate for approximately a year and a half. The second provision, which was to be permanent, was to provide mutual mortgage insurance on houses and low-cost housing. This provision was the heart of the program, because government

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insurance, it was believed, would attract money into the field of home financing. In order to avoid insuring risky investments, only first mortgages were allowed to be insured and the amount had to be related to the appraisal of the property. A mortgage insurance premium would be included within the borrower's regular mortgage payment and would be distributed to the FHA by the lender annually. Additional insurance was available on low-cost rental housing built by limited-dividend corporations. The final two provisions included the establishment of national mortgage associations with the authority to buy and sell FHA-insured mortgages and the creation of the Federal Savings and Loan Insurance Corporation to insure the accounts of savings and loan associations. The enactment of the National Housing Act made funding available for many of the large apartment projects in Arlington County. The first commitment by the FHA to insure a mortgage under Section 207 of the NHA on a low-cost housing act was Gustave Ring's Colonial Village at Wilson Boulevard and North Taft Street (1935, 1939, 1954-1955), in Arlington County. Colonial Village became a model for FHA-assisted rental apartment complexes throughout the United States. Colonial Village, when the three phases were completed by 1955, provided 974 rental units. The success of Colonial Village spurred the construction of other garden apartment complexes based on its design and ideals. Colonial Village was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1980 in recognition of its contribution to the garden apartment movement and the influence of the Federal Housing Administration on rental housing developments in the 1930s.

Amendments to the National Housing Act were passed in 1938 and again in 1939, spurring increased use of FHA-backed financing for projects across the United States and in Arlington County. Arlington Village in Columbia Heights was the second large rental housing development constructed by Gustave Ring in Arlington County. Colonial Village, Ring's first rental housing development in Arlington, served as the model for Arlington Village. The new development's design included and improved upon the initiatives he first set forth at Colonial Village. The planning of Colonial Village, located where "natural scenic or wood tracts afford the most abundant garden potentialities, where the site, rolling or of varying levels, lends itself to planning which is diverse and replete with contrast. Integrated shopping and amusement centers will, or course, be a part of these new communities."¹⁰ The site of Arlington Village, like Colonial Village, was an undeveloped, sloping site located along a major thoroughfare.

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Columbia Pike, which served as the north boundary of Arlington Village, provided residents with easy access to public transportation and shopping. A shopping center serving Arlington Village residents was constructed along Columbia Pike, repeating the retail formula Ring implemented at Colonial Village. "Like its predecessors, this [Arlington Village] latest Ring project will be a complete community in itself."¹¹

One of the reasons for Ring's success at Arlington Village was his ability to keep rents within the reach of the middle-class government workers flooding into the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. The cost effectiveness of the project was reached by Ring's practice of standardization and simplicity. Ring and Harvey Warwick, Arlington Village's architect, standardized the room arrangements by designing seven different apartment floor plans. The two-story floor plans included one-, two- or three-bedroom units with one to two bathrooms per unit. The apartments ranged from a three-room to a six-room unit and were packaged in a rowhouse design. The use of an FHA-insured mortgage for the project meant that Ring had to use certain guidelines and standards in order to receive approval for the project. Ring emphasized the wisdom of the FHA's Large Scale Housing Division regulations and their effect on all housing constructed under the guidance of FHA-insured mortgages.¹² These standards, while not specifically geared toward controlling architectural design, had a substantial influence on the overall design of this apartment complex. The FHA emphasized the elimination of wasted and unprofitable spaces and Ring's designs maximized Arlington Village's ability to provide affordable, yet attractive and desirable, living units for the residents.

The FHA standards addressed seven specific issues: community, neighborhood, site, buildings, dwelling units, services and cost. Regarding the community, FHA required that the area currently support a "number of diverse sources of income for the families to be served and that there exists a need for the type of development contemplated." The FHA also required that the developers give "assurance[s] of continued harmonious land uses; [and] integration of the neighborhood and project." The site was required to be free from adjacent topographic and industrial influences, conform to site characteristics and have a land coverage per acre, "for large-scale projects limited to 20-25%."¹³ One of Arlington County's most favorable characteristics during the 1920s and 1930s was its large tracts of land that had limited or non-

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existent development. Gustave Ring purchased fifty-three acres of largely unimproved land that would be developed into Arlington Village from B.M. Smith for \$362,500 in 1939. This large tract was sited along Columbia Pike, which had been developed with gasoline stations, bus routes, and commercial buildings by this time.¹⁴

The design of Arlington Village incorporated a number of the recommendations put forth by the FHA. The two-story brick buildings are constructed within five superblocks and are orientated toward the center courts, maximizing ventilation. In order to maximize profit and to minimize maintenance costs, Ring had the buildings designed to have all electrical wiring carried from apartment to apartment by exterior brackets on the rear of each building. The use of the rowhouse (duplex) design minimizes maintenance by eliminating public corridor spaces and the need for attendant plumbing connections since all kitchen spaces are on the first floor.¹⁵ The success of this type of complex is evident in its repeated design found throughout Arlington County and the United States.

Arlington County was a testing ground for the FHA's new programs and the early successes here spurred the repetition of the design of these large apartment complexes across the nation. Arlington Village was the first FHA-insured project to be developed for a record-breaking \$11.00 rent per room per month. Arlington Village is an excellent example of the FHA's influence on the garden apartment development in Arlington County and of Ring's association with the Federal Housing Administration.¹⁶

The Community of Arlington Village

The construction of Arlington Village on the former land of B.M. Smith contributed to the fast changing landscape along Columbia Pike in the Columbia Heights neighborhood. Its location along the bus route, a ten-cent ride to downtown in 1939, made the neighborhood an impressive housing choice for middle-class workers moving into the area. Fred Lillis, one of the first occupants of the "H" court at Arlington Village in 1939, was representative of the residents in the neighborhood. The first residents were white, middle-class singles and families including a

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“good many of them army officers of the Cavalry at nearby Fort Myer.”¹⁷ According to Mr. Lillis, the draw of Arlington Village was its location and the quality of the housing.¹⁸ A selection process overseen by Gustave Ring contributed to the similarities of residents allowed to rent in Arlington Village.¹⁹

The quality of the housing was attributed to the real estate savvy of Gustave Ring and the design talents of Harvey Warwick. Ring desired to develop an entire community for the residents. In order to fulfill the sense of community, Ring constructed a shopping center for the complex on Columbia Pike to provide basic services for the residents. The design of Arlington Village and the open recreation areas and park spaces encouraged neighbors to congregate outside their individual units. “The community also had neighborhoods which formed around courts, and young children often concentrated their play in friendship circles expressed physically by the court structure.”²⁰ The influx of returning veterans at the end of World War II and the ensuing baby boom brought forth a large number of families living in Arlington Village. “These children filled the Village, and families socialized intensively through the activities of their children. They played ball on the vacant lot on [South] 13th Street Road [and] played around a wooden bridge that crossed the stream in the woods. The kids cross Columbia Pike every Saturday to see movies at the Arlington.”²¹

Ring retained ownership of Arlington Village until 1950 when he sold the development to New England Life Insurance for \$4,000,000, an investment return of 666%.²² Arlington Village was converted into cooperatives and condominiums in 1979.

Developer: Gustave Ring (1910-1983)

Gustave Ring, born in Weston, West Virginia, grew up in Washington, D.C. and remained in the area until his death. Ring attended Central High School and enrolled in the engineering program at George Washington University in Washington, D.C. While a student, he founded the Ring Construction Company in 1928 at the age of 19.²³

One of Ring’s earliest apartment building developments was the Westchester Apartments on

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Cathedral Avenue in Washington, D.C. This development was organized with Ring in partnership with developer Morris Cafritz and architect Harvey Warwick. This first venture with Warwick laid the building blocks of a professional relationship that would later catapult Ring onto the national building scene.

Ring's development of Colonial Village (1936) and Arlington Village (1939), with Warwick as the architect, represented the beginning of a new type of residential development in the United States. Colonial Village was the first multi-dwelling development to be constructed with a Federal Housing Administration-insured mortgage and its success was advertised across the nation in architectural journals and government pamphlets. Ring retained ownership of Colonial Village until 1977 when he sold the development to the Mobil Corporation.

The Federal Housing Administration, using Ring and Arlington County as a testing ground for new developments, encouraged Ring to develop a second garden apartment complex, Arlington Village, a few years after the completion of Colonial Village. Arlington Village was the first garden apartment complex to be constructed for \$11.00 a room, per unit, per month under the Federal Housing Administration program. This rate, an all-time low for the Federal Housing Administration, was embraced by the FHA and further enhanced the admiration and respect for Ring's developments by his peers and the government.²⁴

In addition to the garden apartments and apartment buildings developed by Ring, he was responsible for the construction of the Ring Building, 18th and M Streets, Washington, D.C. (1948), the Washington Hebrew Congregation building, Macomb Street, NW (1951), and the Woodmont Country Club, Rockville, Maryland (ca. 1950).

The Ring Construction Company was dissolved by Ring in 1978 upon his retirement. In addition to his construction company, Ring was director of the American Security and Trust Company and was chairman of its executive committee until he resigned in 1977. Ring's embracement of the garden city ideals to develop low-cost and high-quality garden apartment complexes and the government's acceptance of Ring's successes helped to create a new residential option for New Deal workers, wartime workers and returning veterans across the

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United States. Ring died on May 3, 1983 at the age of 73.

Architect: Harvey Warwick (1893-1972)

Harvey Warwick, born in 1893, designed two of the most significant apartment building complexes in Washington, D.C.: the Westchester on Cathedral Avenue, N.W. and Colonial Village in Arlington, Virginia, the first large-scale Federal Housing Administration apartment complex. Little is known of Warwick's early life and schooling, but his initial designs influenced the development of the apartment building type in Washington, D.C. Harvey Warwick's first apartment building designs were the prosaic compositions of the seven-building C-A-F-R-I-T-Z Row (1922) on Spring Road, N.W. The unusual massing seen at the Randall Mansions (1923) at 1900 Lamont Street, N.W. reveals a more distinct talent. The Chalfonte (1925) at 1601 Argonne Place, N.W. presents a Mediterranean facade, distinctly influenced by contemporary Los Angeles apartment buildings. His skill with the Gothic Revival, expressed in the 1930s as Gothic Moderne, is seen in the decidedly transitional design for Hilltop Manor (1926, now the Cavalier) at 3500 14th Street, N.W., the Miramar (1929), also on 14th Street, and his triumph, the design for the Westchester (1930) for Gustave Ring and Morris Cafritz.

In 1930, Morris Cafritz joined in partnership with Gustave Ring to conceive the apartment complex to be known as the Westchester on Cathedral Avenue. Retaining architect Warwick to execute their idea, the men intended the Westchester to be a 28-acre project with four, eight-story connecting buildings. Employing the Tudor Revival style, Warwick prepared a design that fully articulated every elevation of the buildings. Only three of the four buildings were completed as the Great Depression reduced developer Gustave Ring's financial ability to complete his plans.

After the Westchester, Warwick's most significant work in the 1930s is often believed to be the Art Moderne design for Cafritz's family namesake Marlyn. However, it was his associate Frances Koenig who actually designed this International Style building in 1938.

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Working with Gustave Ring in 1936, Warwick designed Colonial Village in Arlington County, Virginia. This pioneering garden apartment development was the first large-scale Federal Housing Administration apartment development in the country. Warwick produced carefully conceived apartment building designs within park-like settings. Colonial Village was the area's first garden apartment complex designed as a planned community and developed by Ring. The complex featured open landscaped courts and sidewalks, adjacent shopping, and meticulous attention to amenities and the comforts of renters. Warwick teamed with Ring once again in 1939 to design Arlington Village, their second FHA-insured garden apartment complex in Arlington County.

Warwick designed 44 apartment buildings in Washington, D.C. from 1922-1945. He was a close associate throughout his career of Morris Cafritz and fellow Washington developer Gustave Ring. Warwick's apartment building designs include several large garden apartment complexes in northeast and southeast Washington such as the Skyland Apartments and Suburban Gardens. Colonial Village in Arlington is perhaps one of Warwick's best apartment complex designs. Historian James Goode has determined that "because of its excellence in design and construction, Colonial Village became a prototype for dozens of other large garden apartment complexes in other states."²⁵

Warwick, who employed a variety of architectural styles, produced designs for buildings ranging from the early interpretations of the Art Deco to the Colonial Revival styles. According to Striner and Wirz: "The Commonwealth Building reveals how his [Warwick's] style, like that of so many Washington architects of this period, developed from the highly ornate and eclectic look of the late 1920s to a style rather neatly poised between Art Deco and the International style by the early 1940s."²⁶ Clearly, Warwick's prominence as an architect is associated with his designs for apartment buildings.

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¹ Crandal Mackey, M.E. Church, and others, *A Brief History of Alexandria County, Virginia: Its Wealth and Resources, Great and Growing Industries, Educational and Social Advantages, Future Outlook Promising* (Falls Church, VA: The Newell Printing Company, 1907), p. 19.

² Rose, p. 176.

³ Rose, pp. 7-8, 172. The legislation passed in 1930 prohibits the appropriation of land from a county less than 30 square miles in area.

⁴ Gwendolyn Wright. *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1981. p. 195.

⁵ Goode. *Best Addresses*. p. 324.

⁶ "D.C. Building Activities Show Boom-Like Gains," *The Evening Star*, December 28, 1935.

⁷ "Garden Apartments," *The Architectural Forum*, Volume 72, Number 5, May 1940, p. 309.

⁸ Federal Housing Administration. *The FHA Story in Summary: 1934-1959*. p. 2.

⁹ Federal Housing Administration. *The FHA Story in Summary: 1934-1959*. p. 2.

¹⁰ R. Stanlet Sweeley, "Rental Potentials Define Apartment Types," *The Architectural Record*, Volume 82, Number 4, October 1937, p. 85.

¹¹ "The Way to Record Breaking Rents," *The Architectural Forum*, Volume 71, Number 2, August 1939, p. 135.

¹² "The Way to Record Breaking Rents," *The Architectural Forum*, Volume 71, Number 2, August 1939, p. 34.

¹³ "Multiple Housing Under FHA: Government Housing Standards," *The Architectural Record*, Volume 84, Number 3, September 1938, p. 97.

¹⁴ Dennis Domer. "Arlington Village, Arlington, Virginia, 1939: A Garden Apartment Village," Unpublished paper-The George Washington University, 1989, p. 5.

¹⁵ "The Way to Record Breaking Rents," *The Architectural Forum*, Volume 71, Number 2, August 1939, p. 34.

¹⁶ Gustave Ring. "Large-Scale Housing as a Business," *Insured Mortgage Portfolio*, Volume 1, Number 11, May 1937, p. 6.

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¹⁷ The Way to Record Breaking Rents," *The Architectural Forum*, Volume 71, Number 2, August 1939, p. 136.

¹⁸ Domer, p. 6.

¹⁹ Domer, p. 14.

²⁰ *Arlington Library and Zonta Club of Arlington Oral History Project*, Narrator John Sommers Hull. Interviewer Virginia L. Smith, June 20, 1975.

²¹ *Arlington Library and Zonta Club of Arlington Oral History Project*, Narrators Fred Lillis and Virginia L. Smith. Interviewer Dennis Domer. April 13, 1986.

²² Domer, p. 12.

²³ "Obituaries: Gustave Ring, Builder and sportsman was 73," *The Washington Times*, May 6, 1983, p. 10A.

²⁴ The Way to Record Breaking Rents," *The Architectural Forum*, Volume 71, Number 2, August 1939, p. 135.

²⁵ Goode, p. 332.

²⁶ Hans Wirz and Richard Striner. *Washington Deco*, p. 44.